

# LEXICAL BORROWING AMONG SOUTHEASTERN NATIVE AMERICAN LANGUAGES

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## Abstract

Most sources agree that the pre-contact Southeast showed tribes of several linguistic affiliations intermixed throughout the area with much multi-lingualism. To my knowledge, no systematic study of possible borrowings between linguistic non-relatives has been done. This type of study requires fairly complete word lists or dictionaries assembled not with an eye towards comparative reconstruction and precious few such lists have been published. Using materials I can obtain on the Siouan languages Biloxi, Ofo and Catawba, the Muskogean languages Creek, Choctaw and Koasati, the isolates Tunica, Atakapa, and Yuchi, and two languages, Cherokee and Shawnee, with genetic affiliations, Iroquoian and Algonkian, respectively, outside the southeast, I examine lexical fields such as kin terms, birds, animals, numbers, colors, ceremonial terms, medicines, and plants looking for possible borrowings. Both the presence and the absence of specific language pair borrowing are interesting with respect to pre-contact history, the socio-linguistics of the Native Southeast, and the value systems associated with these languages. Specifically, extensive sharing of ceremonial practices, folk tales, and subsistence life-styles is largely not paralleled by extensive borrowing. One wonders why.

## The Data

In 1978, I suggested that a study of borrowing among the erst-while southeastern Indian languages was both necessary and worthwhile; having proved myself unable to motivate others, I am beginning to undertake such studies myself. This paper constitutes a sort of initial progress report.

This research is fraught with difficulties. The published dictionaries are relatively few in number and heterogeneous in organization, transcription and depth of analysis and definition. Data on

additional languages is available only through "personal communication" (Ballard MS.A, Kimball MS.). Other repositories are known or may be supposed to exist (Haas on Natchez and Creek, BAE and Siebert, on Catawba, Booker on Mikasuki, Mithun on Tuscarora, Voegelin on Shawnee). Nevertheless, there is material and it can be used, and I was curious as to where it would lead.

From the lexicons available to me, I extracted the vocabulary in these semantic domains: trees, plants, birds, persons, numbers, colors, corn, animals, religion and medicine, and socio-economic goods and practices. I present here some miscellaneous findings from several of these and the total results derived from the lists on trees, birds, and tobacco. (It seemed best initially to eschew possible borrowings with semantic shift.) The findings are unexpectedly scanty.

Tobacco was a highly significant religious herb in the Southeast. There are two kinds to be distinguished; ordinary cultivated tobacco, and wild Indian tobacco, or old man's tobacco. Aside from the genetic pair in Ofo and Biloxi, only Yuchi and Creek suggest a borrowing for ordinary tobacco; Yuchi, Creek and Toukawa for Indian tobacco. (Forms from the languages are all cited in the Appendix.)

Corn was only a little more productive. Biloxi and Ofo again shared genetically forms for corn, mortar, pestle, pound, and corn meal. Creek, Koasati and Choctaw share corn, mortar, pestle and pound. Only Yuchi and Atakapa show some possibility of borrowing for corn and corn meal. It is to be noted, however, that in all the languages for which I had forms (Biloxi, Ofo, Yuchi, Creek, Koasati, Tunica, Atakapa, and Shawnee) the form for pestle is derived from mortar; does a matrilineal society reverse markedness for the sexes?

The colors red and white yielded only Siouan and Muskogean cognates; black offered these and potential borrowings between Atakapa and Tunica on the one hand, and Yuchi and Siouan on the other.

For purposes of this compilation, I have included the set for buffalo proposed by Haas (1953). The Biloxi form might be related. But the story is more complicated. The other major ruminant, the deer, shows a Yuchi form that looks like part of the form for buffalo; we - is a common animal prefix in Yuchi. The domestic buffalo, the cow, disturbed these sets upon its entry. Thus, Biloxi, Cherokee, Creek and Koasati all show a form like waka for cow, allegedly derived from Spanish. The Yuchi and Catawba forms could represent a borrowing, but note the Catawba form for deer, and the Yuchi form for buffalo, obviously a derivative of their word for cow. Meanwhile,

the Tunica and Ofo forms reinforce the Yuchi (and Catawba?) for deer. At this point, it is unclear exactly how many words were used for buffalo and deer and what was their derivational relationship (if any).

The last set of miscellaneous forms examined exhaustively were names for other tribes. The Shawnee, Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Atakapa, and Creeks showed up frequently in the dictionaries, usually in recognizable form. The forms for Chickasaw, Choctaw and Atakapa were uniform. The forms for Shawnee, Cherokee, and Creek, however, show at least one form that is quite different; no explanation is offered here for this difference. The sets for Biloxi, Koasati, Tunica, and Yuchi are smaller, but are of some interest. All three forms for the Biloxi are different; the Koasati are called the same thing by themselves and the Tunica; both the Biloxi and the Koasati call the Tunica something different from what they call themselves. The Creeks follow the Yuchi in naming, but not the reverse. It is obvious that names are being borrowed here, but, as elsewhere, more of the etymologies must be known to determine the donors.

One term related to intertribal intercourse shows a fairly narrow distribution, but one that does cross genetic boundaries: interpret.

The domain of trees produced several possibilities. Again, we find Muskogean cognates for hickory, pine, peach, chestnut, slippery elm, post oak, walnut, tree, leaf, palmetto, and mulberry, and Siouan cognates for mulberry and palmetto. These two groups also show some possible borrowings: peach, oak, post oak, pine, dogwood (Creek and Biloxi), and cedar (Koasati and Biloxi). Muskogean languages and Shawnee are similar in hickory and peach; Creek and Cherokee in cedar, acorn, locust(?), apple and peach(?). All other pairs of languages appear to have had less mutual influence. Yuchi and Siouan (tree, leaf); Cherokee and Catawba (hickory); Cherokee and Shawnee (mulberry); Yuchi and Creek (peach); Tunica and Biloxi (cottonwood); and Tunica and Koasati (dogwood).

The last group to be considered, birds, evinces similar patterns of frequent cognates, occasional borrowing--except for goose, woodpecker and whippoorwill. Siouan cognates occur in bird, chicken, quail, buzzard, crow, crane, duck, owl, (wren), cardinal and woodpecker; Muskogean in bird, (chicken), quail, woodpecker, buzzard, goose, owl, hawk, (bluejay), crane, horned owl, dove, whippoorwill, yellowhammer, woodpecker, meadowlark, pelican, and parrot (dove). At least some of the languages in these two large

families share forms for cardinal, bluejay, wren, owl, and horned owl. There appear to be two forms for robin cutting across these lines; one encompasses Catawba and Creek, and the other Cherokee Koasati, and Tunica. Yuchi is included in both of the owl sets, and may also share forms with Siouan languages in duck and chicken. Koasati and Atakapa look alike in duck; Tunica and Muskogean languages look alike for crane; and quail shows similarities between Muskogean and Cherokee. Finally Cherokee and Atakapa may share forms for crow.

We can summarize the numbers of possible borrowings between distinct genetic groups as follows:

#### Total Potential Borrowings Across Genetic Boundaries

	Siouan	Muskogean	Yuchi	Cherokee	Tunica	Atakapa	Shawnee	Total
Siouan	X	12	6	1	0	0	0	19
Muskogean	12	X	4	7	4	2	2	31
Yuchi	6	4	X	0	0	2	0	12
Cherokee	1	7	0	X	0	0	1	9
Tunica	0	4	0	0	X	1	0	5
Atakapa	0	2	2	0	1	X	0	5
Shawnee	0	2	0	1	0	0	X	3
Totals	19	31	12	9	5	5	3	X

Muskogean is the heavyweight followed by Siouan as nexuses of borrowing.

#### Some Analysis

It is well known that the Southeastern Indians shared a great deal of their culture -- socio-economic lifestyle, political and kinship organization, religious symbols and practices, beliefs and

folklore, and, of course, environment. The 'borders' were fluid and there was considerable movement and trade. There was a trade jargon (Mobilian) used by most or all groups to the west, and Drechsel (1982) suggests Creek may have been a lingua franca in the south - east, perhaps Shawnee further north. In short, intertribal intercourse, including intermarriage, was extensive. In view of this extensive intercourse, the shared lexicon seems awfully small. Is it possible to speculate why?

It would appear that there is a socio-linguistic rule against borrowing. Mary Haas, personal communication, remarked that in some cases where the history was known, Creek substituted a native form for an earlier borrowing. I have observed Yuchis using Creek forms in English, which they always found humorous, and I have heard them comment on a particular speaker that used English words in her Yuchi.

Postulating this rule is not explanatory, however; it merely formalizes the data. What was the social function of this rule? Since the smaller groups show far less borrowing than the larger ones, one may hypothesize that language served as a mark of identity, especially for these groups, and especially in view of the extensive sharing in all other cultural areas.

There is a corollary to the rule of avoidance of borrowing: in view of the extensive intercourse between the tribes, borrowing could only have been avoided if there had been fairly extensive knowledge of the other, surrounding languages. Drechsel suggested that Mobilian, and perhaps Creek as a lingua franca, acted as barriers to borrowing.

In a sense, the general resistance to borrowing makes any extensive borrowing more interesting. Why are buffalo, goose, peach, and woodpecker so extensively shared, but not others? It should be noted that the buffalo and goose forms are extensively shared to the west as well. Onomatopoeia or sound symbolism might be suggested as explanations, but such would not explain why goose (and woodpecker) of all the birds were thus singled out, nor would such a rationale appear to explain buffalo and peach. One may be forced to seek for some nearly universal symbolic significance for these items, and/or some value precisely associated with their generality. As further evidence in borrowing is sought in other semantic domains in the data, and as forms are pursued outside of the southeast, one hopes for more interesting insights into intertribal relationships in the pre-Columbian period.

As a postscript, let me assure all readers that I avidly seek input from other parties in developing this research.

## Bibliography

## Abbreviations:

BAEB      Bureau of American Ethnography Bulletin

17th MALC      17th Annual Mid-American Linguistics Conference,  
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The forms in this list are reproduced from the sources without analysis or retranscription, except that stress is not shown. Readers should exercise due caution in interpreting the segmental symbols used; consultation with the sources is advised for any further citation. The languages, their abbreviations, and the sources are as follows:

Atakapa	Ata	Gatschet 1932
Biloxi	Bil	Dorsey 1912
Catawba	Cat	Speck 1969
Cherokee	Cher	Feeling and Pulte 1975
Choctaw	Choc	Swanton 1931
Creek	Crk	Loughridge 1964
Koasati	Koa	Kimball ms.
Ofo	Ofo	Dorsey 1912
Shawnee	Sh	Voegelin 1938-40
Tunica	Tun	Haas 1953
Yuchi	Yu	Ballard ms.a.

A few forms are cited from Booker 1982 and Crawford 1979.

acorn: Cher gule, Crk kvlv

Atakapa: Ata atakapa, Bil takapa, Koa atakapa

Biloxi: Bil taněks, Koa biloksi, Tun halayihku

bird: Ofo deska, Bil kūḍěšk, kutcin, Cat kutcin, (Cher jɪsgwa); Crk fuswv, Koa fo:si, Choc hushi, Chickasaw foʃi, Hitchiti fos-i, Mikasuki fɔ:s-i (forms from Booker 1982)

black: Ofo iftheɸi, Bil supɪ; Choc lusa, Koa lo:ca, Crk lvste; Ata mel, Tun meli; Yu ʔispi, ʔiʃpi

blue jay: Ofo deska ithohi, Koa tiskila, Choc ti<sup>n</sup>shkila; Cat ti<sup>n</sup>de, Yu tsʔə, Crk tɪsɛ (Haas: tasi)

buffalo: Tun yaniskaʃi, Natchez yanasah, Alabama/Koa yanasa, Crk yanasa, Cher yahnsa, (Bil nsa), Hitchiti yanasi; Yu wedɪga

buzzard: Ofo eskha, Bil ɛxka; Cher suli, Crk sulɛ

cardinal: Ofo deska atchuti, Bil kūḍěska atcūtka, Koa tiskomma (see bird, red)

cedar: Cher ajina, Crk vcenv; Bil tcuwahana, Koa cowahla

Cherokee: Cat maɾaɾɔ; Cher jalagi, Crk celokvlkɛ, Koa calakki, Yu dʒəlagi; Sh katoʔhwa

chestnut: Choc otupi, Crk oto-vpe

Chickasaw: Cat tcik sa, Koa cikasa, Sh čikaʃa, Tun čikasa

chicken: Ofo abasi, Bil maxi; Yu wetʃha, Cat wi:tkɔ; Crk tottolose, Koa kolosi

Choctaw: Ata tchakta, Bil tcaxta, Cher ajalɪda, Koa cahta, Sh čaʔta, Tun čahta, Yu tʃhata

corn: Ofo atceki, Bil ayeki; Choc tanchi, Crk vcɛ, Koa cassi; Ata tso-ots, Yu tsotho, tsotʔo

corn meal: Cat kuspa (corn = kus), Ofo atceki naphasi, Bil ye nɪpxi; Ata tso-otslɪli, tso-otsakop, Yu tsotʔobiɪkha

cottonwood: Bil pūtɪtukayudi (ayudi = tree), Tun ropuhtinrihku (rihku = tree) similar loans?

cow: Cat wɛde, Yu wedɪ



## Lexical Borrowing

- crane: Ofo oskxa, Bil oxka; Crk waku, Koa wahka; Crk watulv, Koa watola,  
Choc watonlak, watullak, Tun watoruhki
- Creek: Bil skoki, Koa masko:ki, Sh homaško; Cher agusa, guso'i; Yu gop'a  
( 'one who snoops' )
- crow: Ofo o<sup>n</sup>tcka, Bil a<sup>n</sup>tcka; Ata kāk, kahagg, Cher koga
- deer: Ofo iya, Bil ita, Cat widəboye, Yu weʔjā, Tun ya
- dogwood: Bil na<sup>n</sup>taxpayudi, Crk atvpha; Koa nahiskila, Tun nahika
- dove: Choc pachiyoshoba, Crk pvcē, Koa pacihowa
- duck: Ofo o<sup>n</sup>fana, Bil a<sup>n</sup>s(u)na, Yu šaʔane; Ata cōknōk, Crk coskani
- goose: Choc šalaklak, Karankawa la-ak, Koa salakla, Natche la'lak,  
Tonkawa xelik, Tun lalahki, Yu šalala; Cher sasa, Crk sasvkwv;  
Cat (y)aha, Choc hankha, Crk ahakwv
- hawk: Ofo tuta, atishoska, Cat itusi; Crk ayo, Koa alo
- hickory: Choc oksak, Crk ocē, Koa oca, Sh -očeemi-; Cat wə<sup>n</sup>ɔ<sup>n</sup>ku',  
Cher wane'i
- horned owl: Bil txitūmihayi, Cat istugri', Choc iskitini, Crk opv-estekene  
( opv = owl ), Koa kitini, Yu džiškili
- interpret: Crk yttekv, Koa iyati:ka, Timucua yatiki (Crawford 1979),  
Yu jatik'e
- killdeer: Crk tuwehtv, Tun tuwi
- Koasati: Koa kowasa:ti, Tun kušati
- leaf: Crk to-essē, Koa ittohi:si; Cat yəp'ha, Yu ʔjaš'a
- locust: Cher kalogwekdi, Crk kvtohwpe
- meadowlark: Crk hvnv-celu, Koa nocilolo
- mocking bird: Koa fo:si soba:ci (fo:si = bird), Yu sžbobone (sž = bird)
- mortar: Ofo itcatho<sup>n</sup>, Bil itan-; Crk keco, Koa kihco
- mulberry: Crk kē, Choc bihi, Koa bihi (< fig), Mikasuki bī:hī, Chickasaw  
behi (forms from Booker 1982); Ofo fafanaki, Bil a<sup>n</sup>sa<sup>n</sup>kūdi; Cher kuwa,  
Sh mtekwaa<sup>n</sup>palwa (?)
- oak: Bil udimiskudi, Crk meskvl-
- owl: Ofo a<sup>(m)</sup>pho, Bil pa(da)di, Cat wi'mbata, Choc opa, Crk opv, Koa opa,  
Yu tšup'ane, Tun ʔuwa, Ata wawact
- palmetto: Choc tala, Koa ta:la; Ofo amashūpka, Bil maxo<sup>n</sup>tka
- parrot: Crk pvcē-lanē, Koa pacina:ika (< dove)
- peach: Crk pvkanv, Choc takkon, Koa takkol-, Cher kwana, Ofo oko<sup>n</sup>ti,  
Bil tokona, Sh poʔkama, Yu ʔjabo (ʔja = tree)
- pelican: Crk nok-sukev, Koa noksokca, Tun šukara
- pestle: Ofo itcatho<sup>n</sup>opka, Bil inetopka; Crk kecvpē, Koa kistapi
- pine: Cat itcuwe, Crk culē, Koa coyyi
- post oak: Bil tcaxku, Choc chisha, Crk coskv, (Koa cilaka), Tun čuhki
- pound (as in a mortar): Ofo aphe, Bil apēhe; Crk hočē, Koa ho:ci
- quail: Ofo amaphuska, Bil apuska, Cat ipəke', (Yu špine); Crk kowikē,  
Koa kowayki, (Cher guhgwē)
- red: Ofo tcuti, Bil tcti; Choc humma, Koa homma
- robin: Cat wi:spəkpək, Crk hes-pvkwv, (Ofo bahu); Cher jisgwogwo,  
Koa ciskoko, Tun wišk'ohku, Bil siñkuki
- screech owl: Choc ofunlo, Koa afolo

Shawnee: Cat saw<sup>u</sup>nd, Bil sawa<sup>n</sup>, Sh šaawanwa; Yu jōš<sup>t</sup>a

slippery elm: Choc balup, Crk lupakv

tobacco: Ofo itcani, itani, Bil yani; Yu ?itš<sup>i</sup>, Crk hece

tobacco, Indian: Yu ?jutš<sup>h</sup>wa, Crk hece atculi pakpagi, Tonkawa na<sup>2</sup>acwawk

tree: Crk ēto, Koa itto; Cat y<sup>u</sup>p, Yu ?ja

Tunica: Bil tunicka, Koa tanihka; Tun yoroni

walnut: Crk ahahwv, Koa hahi

whippoorwill: Bil tcipanakano, Crk cukpēlapēla, Koa cokbilabila,

Yu tšiš<sup>i</sup>pilak<sup>2</sup>ā ne, (Cher tsgwalegwala)

white: Ofo afhan, Bil san; Crk hvtkē, Koa hatka

woodpecker: Ofo pathopka, Bil pūkpūkayi, Yu sēpha, yapapane (Wagner),

Cat pakpi<sup>i</sup>, Choc bakbak, Koa bakba, Tun pahpahkana; Yu sēkhwakhwane,

Tonkawa ya<sup>2</sup>k<sup>w</sup>ak<sup>w</sup>

woodpecker, sp.: Crk cahevkvv, Koa cacahka

wren: Ofo tculeska, Bil tcinohedi, Crk celuehkv, colihkv, Tun čihčiri

yellowhammer: Choc fituktak, Crk fētukkv, Koa fitokko

Yuchi: Crk yutev<sup>l</sup>kē, Yu ?judži



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